Culture and Society in Mo Yan's Novels: A Critical Study

Synopsis submitted to

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For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

Under the faculty of Arts

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(March 2022)

Introduction:

The present research study of Chinese literary tradition is one of the major Asian literary traditions marked by enviable glory and variety. Much-like the glorious Indian tradition, it has a long and respectable history dating back to several centuries. Its texts have been preserved for over 3,000 years owing to the widespread tendency of respect for antiquity and cultural traditions. It has led to the invention of woodblock printing in the 9th century and moveable type printing in the 12th century. This tradition of glorification of cultural past has enhanced the reading culture through the establishment of libraries and literary activities. Remarkably, China can boast of a sound cultural tradition in Chinese vernacular languages regardless of dialectal variations. There was a considerable gap between literary language and the actual speech of the masses in China. This has encouraged the practice of translation and imitation.

The traditional Chinese literature abounds poetry; early folk songs established the *shi* (shih) form that crystallized during the Han dynasty and dominated for the next 1,200 years. Beginning with the simple complaints and longings expressed in rhymed couplets of folk songs, this form gradually became more and more complex, or "regulated," until it took years of study to master its formal rules of composition. The short story, which began to develop during the Tang dynasty, at first emphasized either historical events or supernatural happenings which could not be related in a formal historical work. The notion of fiction as connected to history persisted, yet more imaginative and rationally inexplicable, culminating in China's greatest novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* or *The Story of the Stone*, which is at once autobiographical and realistic, and at the same time imaginative and mystical.

Mo Yan (born 1955-) is a Nobel Prize-winning Chinese writer known for his brilliant use of Chinese mythology, creativity and artistic skills using existing socio-cultural issues as themes in his writings. His name, Mo Yan, is a pseudonym of Guan Moye which means "does not speak" in Chinese, expressing exactly the opposite as he expresses contemporary socio-cultural, economic and political problems in almost all of his literary works. He explained on one occasion that the name comes from a warning from his father and mother not to say what he thinks outside, because of China's revolutionary political situation in the 1950s.

Most of his fictional works like *Red Sorghum (1987), The Garlic Ballads (1988), The Republic of Wine (1992), Big Breast and Wide Hips (1996), Sandalwood Death (2004), Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out (2006), Wa (2009) and Change (2010)* have been deemed subversive because of their strong criticism of contemporary Chinese society. As Time Magazine explains, Mo Yan bypasses government censorship using "the skillful subtlety of his realistic and magical style". His works have rightly been described as 'bio-political narratives' depicting people and places deeply rooted in the soil and culture of China with abundant scenes from his hometown of Gaomi, a remote agricultural area, with the literary space of fantasy. He thus opened the way of Asia to the world, demonstrating the importance of Asian culture for the world. His strong nativist position is clearly evident through his assertion which makes no sense to follow others. He has asserted that if everyone is heading west, then he will head east. It not only guides Chinese literature, but demonstrates the spirit of driving Asian literature that has been linked by the suffocating influence of modern Western literature and the weight of history and tradition.

His Literary Peregrination:

His literary odyssey began with the publication of a short story in a literary journal in 1981, and his breakthrough came a few years later with the short story *Touming by Hong Luobo*. By the late 1980s, he had gained considerable respect as a writer in William Faulkner fashion. He had created a microcosm of folk inspiration that documented both the past and the future of Chinese society and a unique literary world by mixing the narrative expression of traditional Chinese literary arts with avant-garde techniques. In his novel Change, he also recalled many unsuccessful attempts to publish his writing - a short story "Mama" and a play in six acts *Divorce*. His first published short story, "Rainy Spring Night", appeared in the literary review Baoding Lily Pond in 1981, followed the following year by "The Ugly Soldier". In 1984, the year he joined PLA's Arts College, he won a literary award from PLA Magazine, adopted the pseudonym Mo Yan, and published his first novel, *A Transparent Radish*.

In 1986 *Red Sorghum* won the National Best News award, becoming an internationally renowned film the following year. This sequence launched Mo Yan's career as a writer as well as the career of film director Zhang Yimou and lead actress Gong Li. Since then, he has published more than a dozen novels and received all the main national literary prizes that China

has to offer. In the process, he saw works removed from the shelf and banned more than once due to his satirical treatment of Chinese institutions and historical movements - seen through the eyes and experiences of people rather than policy makers and policy implementers. He writes on the intestinal aggression and bravery of peasants against Japanese soldiers, against both sides of the Chinese Revolution, forced migration and the collectivization of the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution and its consequences - to through oral traditions, stories and personal observances.

Mo Yan's writing depicts the violent vitality of men engaged in war and sex, and it elevates the resilience and patience of the women. Women are boasted of their determined and creative will to support their fate (exploited and taken for granted) while men drink, love and fight resolutely. The critics note that in most of his novels, "brutal and relentless masculinity ... serves as a stark contrast to the tame and sexually repressed heroes of proletarian literature from previous generations." In his writings on these social and economic themes in their history contexts, Mo Yan draws on his decisive experiences and on the parameters of the city of Gaomi at the county level in the eastern province of Shandong. He lived, endured and escaped rural isolation and starvation. He witnessed and lived through the legacy of dark decisions made by ordinary people under duress.

His works are therefore mainly social commentaries, and he is strongly influenced by the social realism of Lu Xun and the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez. In terms of traditional Chinese literature, he is deeply inspired by the classic epic novel *The Republic of Wine: A Novel* (1993) based on Water Margin folklore. He also cites Journey to the West and Dream of the Red Chamber as formative influences. Mo Yan, who himself reads foreign authors in translation, strongly advocates reading world literature. In an opening speech at the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair, he spoke of Goethe's idea of 'world literature', saying that 'literature can overcome the barriers that separate countries and nations'.

His works are epic historical novels characterized by hallucinatory realism and containing elements of black humor. A major theme in Mo Yan's works is the constancy of human greed and corruption despite the influence of ideology. Using dazzling, complex, and often graphically violent images, he sets many of his stories near his hometown, Northeast Gaomi Township in Shandong province. He satirizes the genre of socialist realism by placing

workers and bureaucrats into absurd situations. His writing is characterised by the blurring of distinctions between past and present, dead and living as well as good and bad. Mo Yan appears in his novels as a semi-autobiographical character who retells and modifies the author's other stories. His female characters often fail to observe traditional gender roles, such as the mother of the Shangguan family in *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, who fails to bear her husband any sons, instead is an adulterer, becoming pregnant with girls by a Swedish missionary and a Japanese soldier, among others. Male power is also portrayed cynically in *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*, and there is only one male hero in the novel. The literary contribution of Mo Yan is as follows;

Novels:-

1) Red Sorghum (1986), 2) The Garlic Ballads (1988), 3) Thirteen Steps (1988), 4) The Herbivorous Family (1993), 5) The Republic of wine: A Novel (1993), 6) Big Breasts and wide Hips (1995), 7) Red Forest (1999), 8) Sandalwood Death (2001), 9) Pow! (2003), 10) Life and Death are Wearing Me Out (2006), 11) Frog (2009).

Short story and Novella Collection:

1) White Dog and the Swing (30 short stories, 1981–1989), 2) Meeting the Masters (45 short stories, 1990–2005), 3) Joy (8 novellas; six of them are published in English as Explosions and Other Stories), 4) The Woman with Flowers (8 novellas, 2017), 5) Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh (9 novellas; one of them, Change, is published independently in English)

Other Works:-

1) The Wall Can Sing (60 essays, 1981–2011), 2) Our Jing Ke (play), 3) Broken Philosophy (interviews, only available in Chinese), 4) Ears to Read (speeches, only available in Chinese), 5) Grand Ceremony

Review of Literature:

Several research works have been done in the field of thematic concern in Chinese English novel. However, Mo Yan remained much unexplored from the point of his culture and society. As this aspect of investigation is not touched upon by any researcher. It can be discussed thoroughly in proposed study. I have search review of literature found one comparative study title Social and Political Realism in the select novels of Doris Lessing and Mo Yan: A

Comparative Study.

Hypothesis of the Research:

The present research would be based on the following assumptions.

1) Mo Yan's novels world has confluence of Chinese and western culture.
2) His themes and art are no longer Chinese but has universal application.
3) Mo Yan used innovative cultural, social and political issues in his novels.
4) Mo Yan's culture and society is different from his contemporary writers.
5) He dealt with the post colonial themes having multicultural aspects.
6) The fictional world of Mo Yan reflects Chinese socio-cultural milieu.
7) He has focused on several issues related to the youth in the contemporary scenario.
8) The situations and characters in Mo Yan's novels reflect the real condition of China in the contemporary period.

Importance of Research:

The present research study explores contemporary Chinese tradition , cultural , Social, Political and literary significance of China . Mo Yan's novels are the valuable phenomenal presentation of peasant culture and society. The study of the novels of Mo Yan will be a reliable documentation which will give new direction to the researchers. The discussed issues will be equally valuable to the scholars, readers and researchers.

Aims and Objectives of Research:

1. To study culture, society, festivals and food of China.
2. To surmise the culture and society in Mo Yan's Novels.
3. To study various themes dealt in the novels of Mo Yan.
4. To assess culture and society adapted by Mo Yan in his novels.
5. To discover the place of Mo Yan in contemporary Chinese English Novel.
6. To assess how the works of Mo Yan are different than that of his contemporaries.
7. To reveal the impact of post- colonial context and ideology in the novels of Mo Yan.
8. To understand dress code, tradition , custom in Mo Yan's novels.
9. To highlight socio-cultural and political policies adapted by Chinese government.

Scope and Limitations of the Research:

The proposed research work is an attempt to study of the selected novels of Mo Yan thoroughly. His selected novels encompass post modern themes presented with innovative culture and society. Thus, the study is confined with his novels and the themes dealt in and culture and society. The scope of the study will be the on discuss various themes and techniques used by Mo Yan's novels. The present research work has focused only nine novels by Mo Yan. The novels taken for proposed research work are: *1) Red sorghum (1988), 2) Garlic ballads (1988), 3) The Republic of Wine (1993), 4) Big Breasts and Wide Hips (1995), 5) Red Forest (1999), 6) Sandalwood Death (2001), 7) Pow! (2003), 8) Life and Death are Wearing Me Out (2006), 9) Wa (Frogs, 2009).*

Data Collection:

The data required for the present research work will be carried out by following two ways:

1) **Primary Data:** The primary data will be the original texts of Mo Yan.
2) **Secondary data**: The secondary data will be collected from research articles, previous research and research journals and Interviews of Mo Yan with eminent scholars and Web sources.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

The present research work study will be organized around the following tentative chapter scheme.

Chapter I

Chinese Literary Tradition: An Overview

1.1 Introduction:

1.2 Early Chinese Writings:

1.3 The Novel in China : Rise and Development :

1.4 Contemporary Period (1975 –2015):

Chapter II

Mo Yan: A Bio-Literary Chronicle

2.1 Birth, Parentage and Milieu:

2.2 His Childhood and Education:

2.3 Formative influences:

2.4 His Married and Familial Life:

2.5 His Literary Peregrination:

2.6 Mo Yan's Novels: A Brief Introduction;

2.7 His Substantial Contribution and achievements:

Chapter III

Critical Analysis of his select Novels

3.1 Red Sorghum (1986)

3.2 The Garlic Ballads (1988)

3.3 The Republic Of Wine: A Novel (1993)

3.4 Big Breasts And Wide Hips (1995)

3.5 Red Forest (1999)

3.6 Sandalwood Death (2001)

3.7 Pow ! (2003)

3.8 Life And Death are Wearing Me Out (2006)

3.9 Wa (Frog) (2009)

Chapter IV

The four chapter will explore **Elements of Culture and Society in China and phenomenal study of Mo Yan's selected novels.** Mo Yan, eminent personality in the 21st century English literature, has earned name and fame with the power of his writings. His outstanding contribution to the English literature earned him the most prestigious literary honor, 'Nobel Prize'. In his writing he explores the culture and society on the lives of Chinese inhabitants, often using his native, Chinese as a backdrop. In this chapter researcher will focus study on Mo Yan's nine novels central ideas and theme on study of culture and society of China.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The last chapter will conclude the entire research work. The observations and findings will be documented in this chapter. The commendable conclusion drawn from the study will be

recorded in this last chapter. This chapter will also underline the relevance and significance of study along with the further areas of research.

Research Methodology:

The researcher will use the descriptive and analytical method for finding the facts. The study will be based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources will be the original texts and secondary sources will be the reference books, critical books, journals and material available in the libraries and the internet. The MLA Handbook of research methodology will be used with proper citation for the present research.

Place of work and facilities available:

The present research work will be carried out at School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies SRTM University, Nanded, which has a well equipped library with a number of books and novels. Internet facility is also provided in the library.

Probable Date of Research Completion:

The present research is proposed to be completed within the time limit as stipulated by Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded.

Note: - The present synopsis is mere an outline of research work. The changes may be inevitable in the chapter scheme or concerned study during the research work.

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